

Long Lots School Building Project: Frequently Asked Questions

The FAQs are meant to answer common questions with facts and information. There is no intention to be vague, obfuscate or use legalese. If any of the information provided below is not clear, please feel free to ask the Long Lots School Building Committee (LLSBC) for clarification.

General Project Information

Who is leading the project?

State statute mandates that the Town appoint a building committee to manage large-scale school building projects. Every school building project (whether renovate or new build) has been managed by a town-led building committee. Westport's Town Charter directs the First Selectwomen to appoint members to the building committee. The building committee is comprised of volunteers and town employees who have the experience and knowledge to lead the evaluation of the current state of the facility, identify feasible renovate or build options, recommend options to the Town and execute the project. The building committee is not intended to be a committee of project stakeholders.

Where can I find information about the LLS building project?

As with all Town meetings, LLSBC meetings are noticed on the town's website:

<https://www.westportct.gov/about/advanced-components/meeting-list-calendar>. If you would like to receive notice about meetings, please go to the Town website and sign up for meeting notifications. Agendas, minutes and other information can also be found on the LLSBC page on the Town's website under "Appointed Committees."

The LLSBC Facebook page also provides project updates: [LLSBC Facebook Page](#)

The LLS project is not new. The BoE has been discussing a renovation or rebuild of LLS at various public meetings throughout 2021-22, prior to the appointment of the LLSBC in September 2022.

Is the public allowed at LLSBC meetings?

Community members are welcome and encouraged to attend. Public comment is typically at the beginning of the meeting and often again at the end if time permits.

LLSBC meetings had been held in small Town Hall meeting rooms because attendance had been limited. This was in no way, an attempt to dissuade people from attending. With the recent increase in interest and attendance, we have been working to schedule meetings in larger meeting space at Town Hall.

Meetings are scheduled based upon committee member availability. Many of the committee members, although experts in their fields, are volunteers with professional commitments. In addition, meetings are scheduled based on readiness and availability of the contracted consultants.

What are the stages of the LLS project?

The common stages for building projects are:

- *Assessment* – evaluation of the current state of the building (such as mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems, building envelope, structural components)
- *Feasibility* – determination of the full range of all possible options based on project scope, constraints and requirements (including architectural and construction design planning, environmental testing, estimation of project timeline and cost)
- *Design* – development of detailed design documents for contract bidding (architectural, engineering, structural schematics), approvals and construction
- *Build*: construction of the new/renovated building
- *Hand Off* – Building Committee returns responsibility for building operation to the school district (completion of punch list items, training of building and maintenance staff)

When will a decision be made whether to pursue a renovation or new build for Long Lots?

The LLSBC expects to present its feasibility options in early September. Town governing bodies will then review and vote on how the project will proceed.

Who will decide what will happen with the LLS building project?

As taxpayers, Westport residents are the ultimate decision-makers. The final decision as to whether to renovate, expand or build a new Longs Lots School will be made by RTM members, as the elected representatives of town residents. The LLSBC expects to present feasibility options, including costs, timelines, and trade-offs, to town governing bodies in early September.

Governing bodies will deliberate, and hopefully decide in a timely manner, which option(s) to pursue, as well as approve funding for the next stage of the project, the Design stage, which would then kick off shortly after.

As with other town projects, the detailed design plans & schematics will be presented and reviewed by all required town boards during the Design stage (P&Z, ARB, etc.).

In addition, many town departments, commissions and organizations such as Sustainable Westport, Parks & Rec, Transportation, the Conservation Commission, WCG, etc., will be consulted throughout the process as appropriate.

What will the decision be based upon?

The decision will be based on multiple factors, including but not limited to:

- Fulfillment of educational specifications
- Disruption to students & faculty in the building during construction
- Parking & traffic circulation considerations
- Potential to incorporate sustainability elements
- Impact to neighbors
- Impact to current site elements such as gardens, preserve and fields
- Project cost
- Project timeline

Building Design

What are the options being explored for feasibility?

A) *Renovate as New*: Renovate the existing building, maintaining the current footprint. The bare bones structure of the building will remain but all new mechanicals, electrical and plumbing systems will be installed, and the envelope of the building (walls, roof and some below grade areas) will be replaced. (CMS was a Renovate as New)

B) *Renovate as New with Additions (Expansion)*: As above but with the addition of new sections or wings added to the school which would change the existing footprint. (SHS was a Renovate as New with Additions)

C) *Build New*: Build a new building from the ground up, including all new structure and systems (BMS was a Build New)

Each of the options above will also include sustainability recommendations.

With each of these options, there will be corresponding site plans which include the range of feasibility options for the layout of parking, bus and parent traffic circulation, playground areas, gardens and fields.

If the LLSBC's recommendation is to build a new LLS building, where will the new building be located on the LLS property?

A final location for a new build hasn't been determined yet. Multiple locations are under consideration, including the lower, middle and upper fields. With each building option, site plans will also need to be evaluated for feasibility. The committee is beginning to review the associated site plans to assess feasibility and trade-offs.

Can additional floors be added to the building?

The structural frame of the current building cannot sustain additional stories without significant reinforcement and rebuilding which would not be worth the investment given the age of the building. In addition, the school needs to remain operational for students during construction and it would be cost-prohibitive to stage the project in such a way as to avoid construction when students are in school. It is also now against state regulations to build while people are underneath the construction area.

However, several of the current feasibility designs for a completely new building include two-stories, making use of the existing topography by building into hillsides on the property. CT regulations state that kindergarten & first grade students must be able to exit the building at ground level so these classrooms and all common areas (cafeteria, nurse, etc.) need to be located on the ground level. Consequently, there is a limit to what portions of the building can be located on a second floor which is a constraint on the design options. Finally, the building is located in a residential area so building height needs to meet local residential planning and zoning regulations.

Site Elements (Parking, Traffic Circulation, Fields & Gardens)

Who owns the property surrounding the LLS building?

The Town of Westport owns all the property that is part of the Long Lots campus (this includes parking areas, fields, play spaces, driveways and gardens).

Why are we considering options that relocate or modify site elements such as the Westport Community Gardens & Preserve (WCG)?

The project requires balancing the needs of multiple stakeholders - students, parents, community gardeners, recreational athletes, neighbors and taxpayers. The Building Committee is responsible for exploring all feasible options to the town in order for town governing bodies to make informed decisions on the value of the project investment, trade-offs, cost to taxpayers and/or use of taxpayer resources. With respect to the WCG specifically, there may be options to preserve the gardens in their current location, but governing bodies need to understand, and taxpayers deserve to know, the cost and trade-offs of that option, as well as all other options, to determine the best path forward.

Will the WCG & Preserve be permanently eliminated?

No. There are no new build, expand or renovate options that permanently eliminate the WCG & Preserve from the property.

What does it mean when the LLSBC states that the WCG & Preserve could be modified?

Modifying any of the site elements has been a part of project discussions from the start. Modifying the gardens (or any of the site elements) could mean reducing or enlarging the size of elements, reshaping elements, or relocating a portion of an element to accommodate the building design within the property constraints. Any potential modifications are yet to be determined and will be reviewed and discussed as part of the feasibility design process.

Will the WCG & Preserve definitely be relocated?

This has not yet been determined.

Through mid-August, the LLSBC had been reviewing preliminary feasibility options for just the school building. In late August, the LLSBC began reviewing the corresponding site feasibility plans, which include possible locations for site elements such as traffic circulation, parking, gardens, preserves and fields. In some draft plans, the gardens and preserve remain, and in some the gardens will need to be modified or relocated.

If the WCG & Preserve needs to be modified or relocated, will this impact both the gardens & the preserve?

In options where the gardens need to be relocated, it is possible that most, if not all, of the preserves could remain. Additional preserves could also be created adjacent to any potential new site for the gardens.

Can the WCG be relocated?

There are differing views on whether the WCG can be relocated. The LLSBC respects the perspectives of the many gardeners and residents who feel that relocating the gardens is the same as eliminating them. Understandably, the notion of relocating the gardens is unsettling to some community members. The LLSBC recognizes that relocating the gardens could likely impact some vegetation, and that the relocated gardens may not be identical to the gardens as they stand today.

Gardens, in general, can be relocated. If this option is pursued, the Town would look to provide nutrient-rich soil, rebuild the raised planting beds and support the process of relocating plants and shrubs, as well as plant new shrubs and trees to create new preserve areas. While some vegetation may not survive the relocation, not all vegetation survives in any given year due to a variety of reasons (weather, drought, pests, etc.) and trade-offs will be necessary in any project. Relocating the WCG, would also provide an opportunity for the WCG to partner on the design of a more efficient and user-friendly garden design and layout, helping to eliminate poor drainage issues and areas of invasive weeds in the current location.

The WCG & Preserve is a vibrant part of Westport. With support from the Town, the WCG may need to be physically relocated, but the strong WCG community will not and cannot be destroyed.

Is an option being developed to preserve the WCG in their current location?

Yes. Several of the options under development maintain the WCG in its current location. Governing bodies and taxpayers will be able to understand the cost and trade-offs of all the different options.

Will all the current recreational soccer and baseball fields on the property be replaced or will any fields be eliminated?

The soccer and baseball fields on the LLS property are elements of the site that could also be impacted. As with the WCG, the Building Committee is exploring options for placement of the fields and will present any trade-offs (such as smaller field sizes or elimination of fields) across the different feasibility options.

Can fields be moved to another location in town?

The recreational fields throughout Westport are heavily used. Scheduling practices, games and other recreational activities across the available fields is, and has historically been, a challenge for Parks & Rec. It is not the Building Committee's responsibility to decide whether gardens or recreational fields should be prioritized in the options being developed. The Building Committee's responsibility is to determine all of the feasible options for building, expanding or renovating LLS, including the feasible site plans associated with the options. Parks & Rec is responsible for determining whether the Town has the appropriate quantity and types of fields to meet recreational needs. The Building Committee has asked that Parks & Rec continue to pursue other options for field space as a possible alternative to the LLS site.

Can we move the baseball field instead of the WCG if it comes to that?

Due to field sizes and the flat topography required, the WCG and fields are not easily interchangeable in terms of placement. A high school baseball field requires approximately 160,000 sq ft (+/- 4 acres) of flat land, and 200,000 sq ft when including parking. The WCG (currently 44,000 sq ft) can be flexible in terms of size and does not require equal grading across the entire garden. It would likely be significantly more expensive to re-grade or move drainage areas on others parts of the LLS site, even if a field could fit in those areas. If there are any areas where fields could fit that would enable the WCG to remain in its current location, the LLSBC is assessing the cost of re-grading, changing drainage, etc. so the town governing bodies can consider all options.

Are any temporary or interim solutions part of the plan?

No. There are no feasibility options that include temporarily relocating any site elements during the project.